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SUBJECT: Tadic Caves: DS and DSS Confirm the "Necessity of a Unified State" But Say Nothing on EU Path

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Summary

¶1. (SBU) The Democratic Party (DS) and the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) said on February 12 that their number one priority was to pursue a unified position protecting the territorial integrity of Serbia, and government's institutions will work towards fulfilling this objective. Missing from the government statement was any reference to how the gridlocked government should move forward towards the EU. The statement received criticism from all sides of the political spectrum, including from within the governing coalition. With no reference to the EU, Serbia's leaders appear to have put Serbia's path to Europe, a supposed top DS priority in Tadic's reelection, on deep ice; and thus postponed an eventual conflict within government. End Summary.

DS-DSS Statement On Unified State

¶2. (SBU) Following consultations between President Boris Tadic (DS) and Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica (DSS) late on February 12, the government issued a statement confirming "the necessity of pursuing a unified state and national policy to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia." The statement reads that due to a "real, impending threat of an illegal proclamation of unilateral independence [of Kosovo], ...all state institutions must take the necessary decision and measures to annul all illegal documents on unilateral independence."

DSS Reaffirms Its Rejection of the EU Interim Agreement

¶3. (U) Despite Monday's statement of unity, the issue which initially brought the government stalemate - the Interim Agreement with the EU - remained unaddressed and unresolved. On February 12, the DSS placed a full page ad in the daily tabloid Kurir stating that "Kosovo is not for sale" and that "no one has a right to sign the 'transitional political agreement' between the EU and Serbia". The ad said the interim political agreement (IPA) was "a deceit that implies our consent to take away Kosovo." According to the DSS ad, the IPA shows that the EU prefers Kosovo to Serbia. The DSS reaffirmed in its ad that it was determined to prevent signing of the IPA with the EU without parliament's consent.

Next Steps

¶4. (SBU) Though actors are still determining the exact choreography of upcoming events, Embassy contacts have confirmed that Tadic is to meet with the National Security Council on February 12 and Kostunica will meet with the government on February 14 to adopt a decision to annul any acts taken by Kosovo towards independence, the statement reads. Afterwards, the government will forward its decision to the

Parliament for its consideration and adoption, though all Embassy sources could only speculate on an exact date for this. Parliamentary Speaker Oliver Dulic's Foreign Affairs advisor, Lidija Vasiljevic, told poloff on February 12 that Dulic will meet with the parliamentary party whips on February 13, and plans are currently underway to arrange Tadic's inauguration on February 14. A full meeting of Parliament will most likely take place on either February 17 or 18 to discuss Kosovo, contacts in the DS, G-17 and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) confirmed.

DSS Satisfied with Deal

¶ 15. (SBU) DSS Vice President Milos Aligrudic told poloff February 12 that the government appeared to be stable now that "all major parties" had agreed that opposing an EU mission to Kosovo based on the Ahtisaari Plan was the most important issue facing Serbia. Aligrudic said that the DS, DSS and Radicals had all reached an agreement this week "at the highest levels" to delay any decision by Serbia on the EU's offered IPA and focus instead on "annulling Kosovo's declaration of independence." Although he said the DS-DSS "negotiated" on this, Aligrudic only smiled with satisfaction when asked what the DSS had given up as part of the agreement.

¶ 16. (SBU) Aligrudic said that the DS was in a "difficult position" because Tadic had said during his reelection campaign that Serbia would sign the IPA, but now recognized that it could not. He said that because the Radicals agreed with the DSS on this, the DS "did not have a political majority" to sign the agreement anyway. Aligrudic did not seem worried about the IPA expiring, calling the fact that it remained on the table a "way out" for the EU and Serbia -- the decision to sign the IPA could be revisited at anytime. Aligrudic confirmed, however, that the DSS would not rescind its opposition so long as the EU was considering acting on the basis of the Ahtisaari Plan. He said that Serbia was not hurt by its

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decision to ignore the IPA because on "important issues" like visa liberalization, Serbia would "naturally" leave the Schengen blacklist "on its own."

G-17 Out of the Loop and Frustrated

¶ 17. (SBU) Government coalition partner, G-17 was not consulted by the DS on the agreement and has remained publicly silent until it decides its next course of action. Suzana Grubjesic, Chairperson of the G-17 Plus Parliamentary Group, told poloff on February 12 that her party members were "frustrated" by Tadic's decision. She said she had requested a meeting with the President, scheduled for later that day, to get "clarity" on exactly what the DS agreed to with the DSS; although she admitted she expected only "political answers." The DS is the only party without a strategy, she said, explaining that it is jumping from one tactical decision to another. She said the G-17 had no intentions of leaving the government "for now," noting that the last time the G-17 left government (September 2006) "nothing changed."

LDP Criticizes the Deal

¶ 18. (SBU) Opposition party LDP continued to be vocal against the agreement. Member of Parliament and member of LDP presidency Ivan Andric told poloff on February 12 that the government's statement was "unacceptable" since the interim political agreement with the EU, the main reason for the dispute in the ruling coalition, was not mentioned at all. Andric said people from "across the political spectrum" could not believe that "Tadic would kill himself politically for this deal." Andric said that Tadic had been "completely absorbed by the DSS." He described Tadic's actions as an example of "Byzantine Politics" in which he "thought, talked, and acted differently." Andric said the LDP would continue to call for extraordinary parliamentary elections

Nikolic Welcomes Statement, But Says It Is Too Late

¶9. (U) Serbian Radical Party (SRS) leader, Tomislav Nikolic supported the government statement, but said that this agreement came too late, Belgrade-based Tanjug news agency reported on February 12. Nikolic said that the lack of unity among the ruling coalition and the crisis in the government "practically opened the door to Kosovo independence". He admonished government for not performing its expected functions, stating that that the parliamentary session should have already been held. "In what kind of country is the main news story that the President and Prime Minister met and that government and parliamentary sessions are to be held," he asked rhetorically.

Kosovo the only Issue: Start of a "Patriotic Wave"

¶10. (SBU) Parliamentarians from across the democratic spectrum acknowledged that Serbia's path to the EU was currently off the political agenda, though they disagreed on how long that would last.

LDP's Andric said that this could be the start of a "total defeat of Serbia's European future." He said the LDP would continue to publicly support Serbia's immediate path to the EU, but expected this would become increasingly difficult, particularly after Parliament would vote on the government's action plan for Kosovo. Describing the current situation as a "wag the dog," dilemma, he said the DS now needed Kosovo in the forefront, or else the government would fall back into stalemate. Grubjesic (G-17) acknowledged the EU was off the agenda, and she thought a "patriotic wave" would now sweep Serbia in which politicians would only discuss Kosovo. She said she hoped the "wave would not be a tsunami," and hoped that it would not last longer than mid-March. DS MP Konstatin Samofalov also admitted to poloff on February 12 that the EU path was "temporarily off the table" for "short term purposes" but was optimistic it would be a key issue again "soon."

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The backdoor deal between Tadic and Kostunica appears to have worked once again in Kostunica's favor, placing the Kosovo issue squarely back on center stage at the expense of Serbia's path to Europe. It is difficult to see how Tadic will be able to recover the EU mantle after ceding this round in the fight to the DSS. There is now obvious frustration not only from the opposition LDP but also from coalition member G-17. Although the current political stalemate has now simmered down, it is hard to see how this will not reappear when --or if--Kosovo is removed from the government agenda.

End Comment.

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